

Speech by SJ at 9th Training Session of China-AALCO Exchange and Research Program on International Law (HKSAR Session) (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Justice, Mr Paul Lam, SC, at the 9th Training Session of China-AALCO Exchange and Research Program on International Law (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Session) today (July 7):

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. It is my pleasure to welcome you all to Hong Kong, and to the Department of Justice (DoJ) of the HKSAR Government. I am truly delighted to see you all from over 30 jurisdictions and from the AALCO (Asian-African Legal Consultative Organization) Secretariat, as well as the African Union Commission gathered here today. It is nothing short of remarkable that we are all brought together here in Hong Kong for the 9th Training Session of China-AALCO Exchange and Research Program on International Law (HKSAR Session).

To begin with, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China for organising the China-AALCO Exchange and Research Program on International Law, and the Asian Academy of International Law (AAIL) for organising the Hong Kong session with the support of the Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training Academy of the DoJ.

Close Ties between China and Africa and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), since its inception in 2000, was a multilateral co-ordination mechanism between African countries and China, and is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative. Since the founding of the FOCAC, China has become Africa's largest trading partner, largest source of infrastructure investment, and one of the most significant development partners in the world.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and African nations, a milestone that both reflects a long history of friendship and opens a new chapter for future collaboration. Moreover, the National 15th Five-Year Plan of China provides vast opportunities for further deepening of China-Africa co-operation. For instance, China expanded its zero-tariff treatment to cover all 53 African countries with which it has diplomatic ties, creating new opportunities for Africa to boost exports and industrialisation .

As stated by President Xi Jinping in his keynote address in the 2024 Beijing Summit of the FOCAC, China will work with Africa to implement 10 partnership actions for modernisation to deepen China-Africa co-operation and spearhead the Global South modernisation. These partnership actions, which cover areas such as trade, industrial chain co-operation, infrastructure projects, healthcare, agriculture, green development, and people-to-people exchanges and mutual learning, also carry significance for Hong Kong. In particular, they will generate growing demand for high-quality cross-border legal and dispute resolution services, in which Hong Kong can play a significant part.

Beyond the well-established and growing relationship between China and African nations, China, through the HKSAR, has maintained strong and substantive legal ties with many Asian nations. At present, the HKSAR has concluded bilateral mutual legal assistance agreements with several ASEAN states, facilitating cross-border co-operation in criminal matters and enhancing legal certainty in the region. In addition, the DoJ has also signed a memorandum of understanding with Brunei, Cambodia, Japan, Korea and Thailand on general legal co-operation, reflecting its commitment to fostering capacity-building across jurisdictions in Asia.

Against this backdrop, Hong Kong's distinctive advantages position it as a pivotal legal and dispute resolution hub supporting AALCO member states. Hong Kong, with its common law system, robust rule of law and status as an international legal and dispute resolution centre, is uniquely well placed to support and underpin the deepening of co-operation with AALCO member states.

Hong Kong's Unique Strengths

That is exactly why the second phase of this Program takes place in Hong Kong. The common law system of Hong Kong, maintained and guaranteed under Article 8 of the Basic Law of the HKSAR, provides a solid foundation for our mature and robust legal system with judicial independence constitutionally guaranteed, contributing to Hong Kong's success as a long standing international financial centre.

But what makes Hong Kong's legal system truly unique is that it is the only common law jurisdiction within China under the "one country, two systems" principle. Furthermore, it is the only bilingual common law jurisdiction in the world, with both Chinese and English as its official languages. With these unique advantages, Hong Kong serves as an unrivalled international gateway to China. For parties seeking to resolve disputes between Mainland Chinese enterprises and the international commercial sphere, there is simply no better venue than Hong Kong.

The strengths of Hong Kong are convincingly illustrated by the latest figures released by the Hong Kong International Arbitration Centre (HKIAC), which you will visit later this afternoon. In 2025, the HKIAC registered 582 new cases, with the total amount in dispute across all arbitration cases reached HK\$126.2 billion (approximately US\$16.2 billion). What matters even more is the international character of HKIAC's caseload. 84.3 per cent of all arbitrations and 92.9 per cent of all administered arbitrations submitted to HKIAC in 2025 were international in nature, with parties from 61 jurisdictions participated in the arbitrations. These figures demonstrate that parties from around the world have strong confidence in Hong Kong's legal framework, institutions and professionals, and consistently choose Hong Kong as a neutral and reliable venue for resolving cross-border disputes.

Hong Kong's competitive advantages extend well beyond arbitration. As you may know, the International Organization for Mediation (IOMed) was officially inaugurated in October 2025 in Hong Kong. The IOMed is the world's first international intergovernmental organisation specialising in the peaceful settlement of international disputes through mediation. It is also the first international

intergovernmental organisation of any kind to establish its headquarters in Hong Kong. This reflects the trust that the international community has placed in our city.

Recently, in May 2026, the IOMed successfully hosted its first Global Mediation Summit here in Hong Kong, drawing over 1 000 leaders, senior officials and professionals from over 60 jurisdictions to share their experience and insights on international mediation. The establishment of the IOMed gives Hong Kong's new title of the Capital of Mediation. Together with its existing status as an international legal and dispute resolution services centre, it is no exaggeration to say that Hong Kong is the world's most complete ecosystem for international dispute resolution. As you will also be visiting IOMed today, I shall leave it to you to experience this firsthand.

The Program

By this stage of the Program, you should have gained a deeper understanding of Hong Kong's "one country, two systems" framework, finance in international law through the lens of Hong Kong, as well as key areas such as the Judgments Convention, space law, and air law. On the final day of this Program, you will further explore international dispute settlement and investment law. I strongly encourage you to make full use of the remaining time to ask questions, share your own experiences and engage in dialogue with our speakers and with one another. Learning in this comprehensive Program is a two-way process, and I can assure you that we are just as eager to learn from your diverse views and backgrounds as you are to learn from our speakers.

The Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training Academy

Last but not least, let me briefly introduce the Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training Academy, which has provided support to this Program. Since its launch in November 2024, the Academy has collaborated with over 20 international organisations, national or local authorities and professional bodies, in organising capacity-building training programmes in Hong Kong, the Chinese Mainland, other parts of Asia, Europe, Latin America and beyond for over 2 000 participants. The Academy is a direct and timely response to the key initiatives of the National 15th Five-Year Plan of China, in particular, the initiative to support Hong Kong and Macao in building international hub for high-calibre talent. The Academy will continue to make good use of Hong Kong's bilingual common law system and international status, to serve as a capacity-building, as well as knowledge and experience-sharing platform for legal professionals in Hong Kong, the Chinese Mainland and other jurisdictions, in particular those along the Belt and Road. I very much look forward to exploring further opportunities for collaborations with your countries.

Before I conclude, I would like to draw your attention to the upcoming Hong Kong Legal Week 2026, where local and international leading legal minds, practitioners, policymakers and academics will gather to engage in meaningful dialogue, exchange knowledge, and explore the latest developments in the legal field. This annual flagship event of the DoJ will be held in Hong Kong from November 2 to 6 this year. The Hong Kong Legal Week 2026 will take on an even more festive character, as we join the international legal community in celebrating the centenary of UNIDROIT (International Institute for the Unification of Private Law) and the 60th anniversary of UNCITRAL (United Nations Commission on International Trade Law). These

important milestones will add a special dimension of international instruments to our interesting discussions and events throughout the week. I warmly invite you to participate in the Hong Kong Legal Week 2026, and to encourage your colleagues to join you in person or online, so that you can experience even more of what Hong Kong's legal community at its best.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope that you have had the chance to gain a deeper understanding of Hong Kong over the past few days, not only as a leading international legal and dispute resolution centre, but also as a vibrant city with spectacular skyline and impressive cuisine. If you have not yet fully explored all that Hong Kong has to offer, I encourage you to make the most of your remaining time here in the coming days. Thank you once again for your dedication and participation in this Program, and I wish you all the best in your future endeavours. Thank you very much.